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Velvet curtain lifted on technical textiles

INNOVATIONS SHOWCASED AT EXPO

Boat to be made from composite materials

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THE GAZETTE

Uses for textiles are no longer restricted to clothing and curtains.

As demonstrated at the seventh annual Expo Hightex showcasing industry innovations, there's a multibillion-dollar market for what's known as technical textiles.

A striking example of their application greets participants as they enter the exhibit hall at the Palais des congrès: a fully operational, and winning, racecar built with composite materials reinforced by carbon fabrics created by the Quebec division of **J.B. Martin Ltd.**

Operating out of a factory in St. Jean sur Richelieu for 73 years, the subsidiary of France's world leader in velvets since 1832 is also using the technology to build a 40-foot monohull sailboat: Ironically, every part of it except the sail.

In addition to the transportation and maritime markets, company president Nicolas Juillard said J.B. Martin is present in aeronautics, civil engineering, protective wear, industrial and sport and leisure applications.

He noted 70 per cent of the \$20 million in annual business is exported.

Robert Kellock, president of the Expo Hightex 2007 organizing committee, said new hightech applications of technical textiles bring added value and the yearly event allows Canadian researchers and manufacturers to meet contractors and users to present their latest innovations.

Kellock, who is chief executive officer of barrier fabric specialist **Stedfast Inc.**, himself has at least five meetings set up with potential clients.

He credits fair organizer **CTT Group** for its "first-class" R&D and testing facilities in St. Hyacinthe and for its help in making worldwide connections.

The CTT Group (Centre des technologies textiles et geosynthétiques) provides "Canadian networking for international development," president Jacek Mlynarek added.

CTT marketing director Mathieu Rodrigue pointed out North America's technical textile industry was worth an estimated \$24 billion U.S. in 2005 and is expected to reach \$27.5 billion in 2010.

He said Canada represents about seven per cent of the market and that Quebec

makes up 55 to 60 per cent of the Canadian market.

"Quebec is a leader in innovative (textile) technology," CTT board president Francois Lapierre said following his welcoming address to open the two-day expo yesterday.

Lapierre, president of **Consoltex Group Inc.**, Canada's largest manufacturer of textiles and a key player in North America, explained: "What we did best 30 years ago in fashion is now being done in China."

He said the local industry has worked hard the past 10 years developing more lucrative markets.

"We have to change and not be afraid to evolve," Lapierre said.

CCT spent nearly \$300,000 to prepare a technology road map for the Canadian technical textiles and other value-added textiles industry.

It also initiated a service known as ExperTex to support the development of home-grown businesses in the context of the new textile economy and dealing with globalization.

Technical textiles are now used in everything from personal / property protection and construction materials to medical and transportation applications.

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